

## **Sermon for June 20, 2021—“In the Midst of Giants”**

Twelfth Sunday in OT (Father’s Day), Year B—Texts: Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Sam. 17:1-49

Has anyone seen the movie *The Pianist*? If you haven’t, you really should. It was released in 2002 and is based on the true story of a brilliant Polish pianist, who spent the entirety of World War II surviving in Nazi-occupied Poland. At the 2003 Academy Awards, the film won for Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actor for its star, Adrien Brody. It was nominated for four others, including Best Picture.

As I watched, I was reminded, again, of how inhumane people can be. It’s beyond me that there are those who can actually look at others, people made in God’s image, and see them as sub-human. The Nazis looked at gypsies, gays, Poles, Russians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, people with mental and physical disabilities—those deemed “asocial”—including the unemployed and homeless, welfare recipients, prostitutes, beggars, alcoholics and drug addicts and, of course, Jews, as being less than human.

The pianist, Wladyslaw Szpilman, was a Polish Jew. After everyone in his family was deported in 1942 to Treblinka, the Nazi’s pulled him from the line and forced him to stay in the Warsaw ghetto as a laborer. Besides that, he helped smuggle in weapons for the Jewish resistance uprising.

He stood confident in the midst of giants: giants like bigotry, forced labor, harsh winters, hunger, loss of family and friends, physical as well as emotional abuse, prejudice and sickness. Forced to live in the heart of Warsaw’s ghetto, he survived against all odds; Sharing in the suffering, humiliation and struggles with fellow Jews. When, in 1943, the ghetto was cleared and its inhabitants taken to camps, he managed to evade capture and hid himself in the ruins of the capital city. The greatest irony in this story is that it came near the end of the war.

A German captain, Wilm Hosenfeld, discovered the emaciated Szpilman in a bombed-out house. To Szpilman's surprise, the officer did not arrest or kill him. After discovering that Szpilman was a pianist, Hosenfeld asked him to play something on a piano that somehow remained intact. Szpilman played Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 in G minor—Opus 23.

After that, moved by his giftedness, the officer brought him bread and jam on numerous occasions. He also offered Szpilman one of his coats to keep warm in the freezing temperatures. Szpilman would, in all likelihood, have died had Hosenfeld not helped. Hosenfeld was eventually taken prisoner by the Russians and died in a Soviet POW camp in 1952.

The pianist survived to return to the piano in the concert hall and live out a testimony to the fact that it is possible to stand confident in the midst of giants in one’s life. Szpilman did so until his death at age 88 in July 2000.

*In the Midst of Giants.*

Probably not the best title for a Father’s Day sermon, if you want to call this a Father’s Day sermon. *The Pianist* may not be the best movie, to highlight the joy of fatherhood and the importance of dad’s presence in the lives of his children. Actually, the movie *Life Is Beautiful*, about an Italian family during World War II, might be far better.

So—at least at first blush—the story of David and Goliath has little to do with Father’s Day. Still, when you think about it, the sermon title, the movie and the ancient story of a little guy defeating a big guy, against all odds, actually have more to do with Father’s Day—and life—than we may realize.

It is Father’s Day—yes. But first and foremost it is “The Lord’s Day.” So is there a word from God about standing confident in the midst of giants for fathers—and mothers too—or anyone really, who lives life day by day? Of course there is! And I’m glad, because fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, nieces and nephews, as well as cousins and brothers and sisters, face a few giants now and then.

Every family does. Even the family of God, followers of Christ and otherwise, face giants. That’s right. Hard as it is to believe, the church struggles to survive in a world of giants. So how can we hope to do so? How can we stand confident in the midst of giants and survive, eventually thrive, like Wladyslaw Szpilman did?

Enter a young man named David who—as we know—faced off with a giant named Goliath. It’s a remarkable story; a familiar story, about a guy who had remarkable faith in a remarkable God. It’s probably the best known of the stories about David.

This saga has inspired painters and sculptors, musicians and poets and, of course, moviemakers throughout the ages. This story has served as a metaphor for the possibilities that lie in the underdog. I’m willing to bet that most of have heard many “David and Goliath” stories in our lives.

I usually think of the 1980 US Olympic hockey team at Lake Placid, who defeated the overwhelmingly favorite, the 1,000—1 favorite Soviet national team in the game forever known as the “Miracle on Ice.”

You may have heard of Erin Brockovich and her fight against the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. There was a movie made about her story too. You might recall it. Erin was played by Julia Roberts. The real Erin was an environmental activist, with no formal legal training, able to defeat it a huge utility company and its small army of legal experts. I’m sure you can think of other examples, perhaps even from your own life.

But what I want us to consider today is that our reading from first Samuel embodies a story that’s much more than a matter of cheering for the one who is perceived as a potential loser. What I want us to see is that the David and Goliath story personifies the hopes of everyone when they stand in the midst of giants, that represent such devastating and evil power. And I want us to realize, through this story, that there really is a way to stand confident and overcome that evil force and prevail, as the journey into the future is made.

David was able to stand confident in the midst of the army of the Philistines, one of whom was a giant named Goliath—a man who stood 9 feet, 9 inches tall and was armored to the teeth. His sword alone was probably bigger and heavier than David! His spear was certainly taller! But David was only able to prevail because of his faith in the Lord God of hosts. He told the Philistines...

**“You come to me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied.”**

Is that smack talk or what? Probably—though I guess it isn't bragging if you can do it, but to all appearances this boy didn't stand a chance. Still, this youngster—this shepherd boy, this writer of poems, this singer of songs, who would be described as a man after God's own heart of God—stood confident because he came with the armor of God. He simply, yet profoundly, came in the name of the Lord God. That was enough. He was offered the king's own armor and weapons, but besides being a hinderance, David believed that he didn't need them. His way was the way of faith. Father's Day is a reminder, that parents do stand in the midst of the giant called parenting and if we are to do it—and do it right—we are to be equipped with the right stuff, namely—the way of faith.

In 2010, a book was written by John Sowers entitled, *Fatherless Generation: Redeeming the Story*. Many fathers, not all, but many aren't around like they should be—or if they are around, they've so detached themselves from their children that their presence means absolutely nothing. I freely admit that I'm not a father; but I think I've a pretty good idea, having served in youth ministry, of what's involved. So many of my friends, so many men from churches I've served have shared with me their difficulties. So many questions abound:

What do I do?  
What don't I do?  
Do I be a father?  
Do I be a parent?  
Do I be a friend?  
Do I establish boundaries?  
Do I give in to everything?

It doesn't take much to recognize that parenting can be one of the giants in our lives; a giant that taunts us as Goliath taunted David. Perhaps the lesson is that presence alone is not enough. There has to be the modeling of faith. There has to be an example set. And I think David and his brothers had a good example set for them by their father.

It occurred to me, that something's often overlooked in this story and that's the influence of David's own father—a man named Jesse who we met last week. Not much is known about Jesse, other than he was “an Ephrathite, that he was from a little town called Bethlehem, and that he had eight sons.

Based on Scripture, much of which I left out this morning for the purpose of keeping the reading somewhat shorter, Jesse was probably a man of means, but not much is told of his background.

Obscure as he may have been, I think Jesse did something right. He taught his sons to trust in God. He told them the stories with which we are so familiar. Surely they were aware of the faith of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel. Surely they remembered God's deliverance from famine through Joseph. Surely they remembered God's deliverance from bondage down in Egypt through Moses. Surely they were aware of Joshua's challenge to be strong in the Lord and serve Him and Him alone. Surely they knew of all the judges that God raised up to deliver a most foolish people.

Still, it appears that three of Jesse's sons, those who were there fighting with Saul that day, had forgotten those lessons. Unlike their youngest brother, they weren't standing confident.

They, like Saul and the rest of the army, were relying upon their own power, their own military strategies, to defeat the enemy.

Now, facing Goliath they were struck with fear as they listened day after day to his insults. You'd think that at least one of them, would've had enough faith to face the giant in their midst. It's interesting to note that nowhere in this story is there even the slightest hint of faith in God and no mention whatsoever of God, until David shows up.

If our children are to stand confident in the midst of giants, and there are a lot of them out there in the world, then we ought to tell them about the God with whom nothing is impossible; about the God capable of taking down any giant that stands as an affront to his character and our well-being.

You've probably heard me say this before, but I'll say it again: It's time we stopped telling God how big our problems are and start telling our problems how big our God is. How else, besides faith, does David have the courage to do what he did? And how does he have faith unless he's taught that faith by his father? The same is true for all of us—parents or not. Our faith should be such that whatever giant we face can be defeated, because of our faith in the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Armies. A faith like that can do wonders and stop a lot of giants dead in their tracks, just like David stopped Goliath.

There are all kinds of giants out there. There are those we ourselves create. Let us then, put on the whole armor of God, stand confident in the midst of these giants, knowing that they can be brought down.

Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.